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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001053

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: NEW ASSISTANCE AGREEMENT WITH UN  
BROADENS COOPERATION

Classified By: DCM Sylvia Reed Curran, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: A six-year assistance framework agreement signed by the UN and the Turkmen government last week covers a broader range of areas for cooperation than the previous agreement, perhaps a further indication that the Turkmen Government is slowly opening up to the world. Although many of these programs were underway before the agreement was signed, this new document is a green light to go ahead with potentially sensitive programs such as parliamentary reform and climate change. The agreement also highlights the Turkmen Government's continued preference for the UN as its multilateral assistance partner of choice. The expanded assistance agenda and the additional resources needed by UN agencies to implement it could be an opportunity for the U.S. to step up its involvement by providing resources for initiatives in key areas such as electoral reform and parliamentary training. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) On August 15, Turkmenistan and the UN signed the 2010-2015 United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), a document that outlines that collaboration between the UN and the Turkmen Government for the next six years. Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov said at the signing ceremony that President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov fully supported the new program, which covers a broad range of fields including terrorism, counternarcotics, organized crime, education, health care, ecology, and parliamentary reform.

13. (SBU) Resident Coordinator for the UN in Turkmenistan, Richard Young, said in a meeting with poloff that he was pleased with the UNDAF. He noted that it is much broader than the previous document that ran from 2005-2009 and was signed in 2004, and the new UNDAF is wide-ranging enough to cover almost any project that the UN might do in Turkmenistan. The new agreement took almost a year to develop in consultation with the Turkmen government, after which the government spent another half year making changes to the language, particularly the background section.

14. (SBU) Many of the areas that are new to the UNDAF since the last document are ones in which UN agencies have been working with the Turkmen government outside of a formal agreement. However, cooperation in the areas of

parliamentary reform, judicial reform, border control, and climate change is only in the early phases. The Turkmen Government recently requested UN support for parliamentary development, in response to which the UN has developed programs to increase public awareness of what the Mejlis is doing, as well as to train parliamentarians to do their jobs more effectively. In addition, the Turkmen government has expressed concern about the country's carbon footprint, and the Ministry of Energy and Turkmenogas are now working with the UN. The UN also has programs to cooperate with Turkmenistan on sustainable land management and on creating national parks.

¶15. (C) Mr. Young pointed out that the new UNDAF falls into a trend of more openness to the outside world that has been going on, albeit slowly, since Berdimuhamedov became president. The UN Development Program (UNDP) has a program to put Internet connections in schools, and so far has 20 schools connected. Four years ago, no private citizens in Turkmenistan were allowed access to the Internet. UNDP is also working with local-level governments in 10 pilot areas to help them develop their own policies, giving micro-credit to women in Mary and Dashoguz provinces to start their own businesses, and working with the Cental Bank to implement international accounting standards.

¶16. (C) Progress is relative, however. The UN still faces uphill battles as it tries to work with the Turkmen government to fulfill its reporting requirements under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on Torture. Both reports are due

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this year. In addition, UN agencies have trouble connecting with anyone at the Ministry of Defense to discuss an emergency preparedness program.

¶17. (C) COMMENT: In Turkmenistan, progress in many spheres can only be seen if one takes the long view, but that is what the UN is willing to do. The new six-year agreement -- the agreement was intentionally designed to cover six years in order to avoid "five-year plan" references -- signifies the continued commitment by both sides to their relationship. The agreement gives the UN a broader mandate with the Turkmen to press them forward on reforms. In order to deliver on its ambitious agenda, UN agencies will need to look more than ever to donor countries and cooperation with other assistance organizations in order to assemble the resources needed for implementation. This could provide an opportunity for the U.S. and other donors to become involved, in coordination with UN agencies, in areas such as electoral reform and media freedom that the Turkmen have kept off-limits on a bilateral basis. END COMMENT  
MILES